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New York

President:	Mr. Ettalhi	(Libyan Arab Jamahiriya)
Members:	Belgium	Mr. Verbeke
	Burkina Faso	Mr. Kafando
	China	Mr. Liu Zhenmin
	Costa Rica	Mr. Urbina
	Croatia	Mrs. Mladineo
	France	Mr. Ripert
	Indonesia	Mr. Natalegawa
	Italy	Mr. Mantovani
	Panama	Mr. Soler Torrijos
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	South Africa	Mr. Kumalo
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir John Sawers
	United States of America	Mr. Khalilzad
	Viet Nam	Mr. Le Luong Minh

Agenda

The situation concerning Iraq

Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 6 of resolution 1770 (2007) (S/2008/19)

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08-21255 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation concerning Iraq

Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 6 of resolution 1770 (2007) (S/2008/19)

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter from the representative of Iraq, in which he requests to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite that representative to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Al Bayati (Iraq) took a seat at the Council table.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): In accordance with the understanding reached in the course of the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation, under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure, to Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq.

It is so decided.

I invite Mr. De Mistura to take a seat at the Council table.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2008/19, which contains the report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 6 of resolution 1770 (2007).

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear briefings by Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, and His Excellency Mr. Zalmay Khalilzad, Permanent Representative of the United States, on behalf of the Multinational Force.

I now give the floor to Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq.

Mr. De Mistura: It is now five months since the adoption of resolution 1770 (2007), which has provided the basis for broader United Nations engagement in today's Iraq. Many have, understandably, been anxious to see how the United Nations itself has advanced in its implementation.

The mandate accorded under resolution 1770 (2007) provides considerable scope for the Organization to play an effective role in the country. The challenge is doing that. I arrived in Baghdad on 11 November 2007. Since then, I have been reviewing every aspect of the Mission's work to identify, together with the Government of Iraq, priority areas where we could intensify our efforts and produce concrete solutions, national reconciliation being both the guiding principle and the end goal of our job.

The first report of the Secretary-General (S/2007/608) on resolution 1770 (2007) gave an indication of United Nations preparations to assume an enlarged role. The report that I am here today to introduce on behalf of the Secretary-General (S/2008/19) provides an account of the more results-oriented activities of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). The time to talk is over; it is time to act. I will simply share with the Council the broad strategic outlook that has framed the Mission's programme of action, from our initial steps well into a six-month forecast.

UNAMI's modus operandi has been to monitor emerging trends and to propose carefully chosen and time-sensitive initiatives, especially in the areas that have attracted some urgency, either jump-starting processes or galvanizing existing ones. In doing so, we have aimed to be both pragmatic and operational. The resolution is a lengthy one; we have to hand-pick where we can have an impact and add value every time.

Primary areas of attention have ranged from resolving disputed internal boundaries — a subject on which I will touch — assisting returnees and entering the debate on the timeliness and preconditions for

provincial elections. That is in parallel to maintaining sustained focus on Iraq's international partnership under the Compact and advancing regional dialogue, which remains a crucial priority.

Let me start by saying that United Nations activities in Iraq did not begin with resolution 1770 (2007). The United Nations is not a new player, but resolution 1770 (2007) is simply a new resolution, and for us a new challenge. The United Nations has a new and enlarged team in place, which we intend to increase, in both quality and quantity. The new team will give UNAMI, security permitting, always the opportunity to be helpful at the request of the Government of Iraq at this crucial moment in time.

I am looking at the Ambassador of Iraq when I say that, because we mean it. Everything we do must indeed be for the empowerment of Iraqis, must be decided on by and/or in consultation with them and must be aimed at enabling them to exercise their full sovereignty, which is the word for this year, and to assume accountability, which is the second word for this year. Iraqis set the agenda; the United Nations and every country that wants to help them helps to drive it — sometimes by pushing it. But the Iraqis are in the frontlines.

The nature of the main challenges in Iraq is largely unchanged. The political and security terrain certainly remains complex and, prima facie, sometimes quite daunting. The risks and challenges are not lost on us; we have gone through them with many of our colleagues in the past. We are neither immune nor oblivious. But if ever there was a time for it, 2008 is the time to be proactive, the time when positive momentum must be gained.

We cannot ignore the recent improvements, in both the security and political situations in Iraq. The notable decline in hostile activities can be credited to the cumulative effect of increased deployment of troops from the Multinational Force in Iraq (MNF-I), the ceasefire declared by Moqtada al-Sadr — which we hope will be reconfirmed and which we will all work for — the role of the "Awakening Councils" and increased cooperation with neighbours on security-related issues. Let me also add to that Iraqi fatigue. The fact that many Iraqis are tired of seeing that violence has led nowhere is also helping the situation.

The prevailing mood at the end of 2007 was that political advances were not adequate to match and sustain the security gains. We were all feeling a little bit worried, and sometimes frustrated. Indeed, absent a political consensus on the most foundational elements of the Iraqi State, we will achieve no lasting solution on security. We must move on the political front.

However, in all fairness, recent weeks have witnessed some tentative and long overdue, but certainly welcome and very concrete, steps towards national reconciliation and inclusive political dialogue. In that connection, I refer primarily to the adoption of the Justice and Accountability Law, on 12 January. *Mabrouk* for that. That is coupled with encouraging signals of increased dialogue between the Government and the Sunni Arab bloc and the latter's indications that a return to the national unity Government is not at all unlikely. We need to work on that. The Government must be complimented on enhancing such legislation — which is why I just used the word *mabrouk* — which is central to reconciliation efforts, as well as for intensifying its outreach efforts.

The Secretary-General and the international community have spoken many times of a window of opportunity, and 2008 is that window. Clearly, the Government is also signalling that it recognizes 2008 as the year to demonstrate its ability to administer a State that enjoys the broadest support and can deliver basic services — which is the challenge we all face at the moment — and security guarantees, all the while supported by credible and independent institutions. When security improves, the first thing people do, as we all do in life, is to start to ask for services, because security is not as much of a worry as it was. That is why essential services are so crucial this year.

But much is also predicated on intensifying the pace of enacting other crucial legislation, including the amnesty law, which is just today being discussed, and the revenue-sharing and provincial elections laws. Those are crucial laws that need to come forward, like the one we just saw adopted on 12 January.

The Government of Iraq cannot be left alone to tackle the structural, political and security challenges. We know that. It therefore requires the commitment of the United Nations, the assistance of the international community and the constructive re-engagement of its neighbours.

What can the United Nations offer at this time? Will the United Nations value its ability to talk to all sides? We can and we do, and we are in a position to be

able to talk to anyone, both formally and informally. The only people we would never talk to is Al-Qaida, because they have killed our people and continue to kill everyone. The United Nations values its ability to talk to all sides, both formally and informally, all the while safeguarding its impartiality. It can facilitate solutions requiring mutual concessions by offering credibility and international legitimacy in turn. It can also offer technical assistance to build up the capacity of national institutions, and it can assist the various ministries in delivering the basic functions of governance.

How has the United Nations translated that commitment into some kind of immediate action? The first way relates to disputed internal boundaries. I single out that issue because it has been the most encouraging demonstration that Iraqi authorities are willing to work together to resolve even the most divisive of issues in the spirit of national dialogue. As the Council recalls, the deadline for a referendum, according to article 140 of the constitution, was approaching in December — 31 December was right around the corner — and preconditions had not been met. The executive authorities and other players acted in their common vested interest — proving that that was possible — to prevent any further destabilization of an already highly precarious situation. The United Nations facilitated that and was ultimately invited to provide technical assistance to the parties concerned in reaching a peaceful, constructive solution to the question of some of the disputed internal boundaries, not only in Kirkuk, but elsewhere, especially in the north.

That request for our involvement in initiating a dispute resolution process within six months dovetails with our mandate under resolution 1770 (2007), which asks us to do exactly that, among other things. It is also in line with the firm directive by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to myself and my team to be proactive and to have proactive engagement in areas that could yield action-oriented results. Therefore, UNAMI has committed to taking an integrated approach, working on technical assistance packages that do not focus solely on boundary delineation but ensure protection of minority rights, complemented by confidence-building measures. I would certainly be glad to report further to the Council about the techniques and approaches that we are planning in order to ensure that the article 140 issue goes forward.

The second area concerns returnees. Without advocating the mass return of refugees, the United Nations has stood ready to assist those who have chosen to return to their places of origin, while monitoring the conditions of those who are most vulnerable. Some returnees are more vulnerable than others, and they deserve our priority efforts. Since the launching on 4 December of the joint Government-UNAMI plan for refugees, to which the United Nations committed $11.4 million, the International Organization for Migration has already delivered the first response package to 3,000 of the 5,000 families that we identified as the most vulnerable. In the meantime, 600 families are undergoing detailed monitoring pending an assessment, because we need to discover why they are returning, where they are going and what conditions face them when they return. Thus, we can be better prepared, together with the Government, to be of more assistance if they decide to come.

The consolidated appeal Process — with a goal of approximately $200 million — which, inshallah, will be launched on 16 February, will aim to cover the gaps in the most pressing unmet needs not only of refugees, but also IDPs, while shifting the debate to the broader issue of vulnerability. Let us not forget that the problem of refugees and IDPs remains quite large; we are talking about a total of 4.2 million people. It is quite a challenge, not only for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other United Nations agencies that are providing assistance alongside us within Iraq, but also for the host countries, which are facing a substantial burden thanks to their own generous hospitality.

Another area relates to cholera. The immediate threat of a cholera outbreak has been tackled and the cases contained, especially in the north. But with warmer weather ahead, we remain quite worried about potential new outbreaks, particularly in Baghdad and southern cities. Therefore, we are proactively focusing on putting in place mitigating and preventive measures. The United Nations is making use of the funds of the World Health Organization, UNICEF and the International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq (IRFFI), totalling $4.5 million, to develop and monitor the surveillance mechanism. We have also been actively lobbying the Government to approve $40 million to assist the Ministry of Health in facing

such emergencies — which the Iraqis do not need to face in addition to the ones that already confront them.

I now turn to economic reconstruction. A year into Iraq's partnership with the international community, on the basis of a shared commitment to a joint national development strategy, all of us are now called to assess how the Government has delivered on its commitment to a range of reform measures, particularly in the economic field, and how the international community — our side — has been honouring its own pledges, including for Iraq's debt relief.

The remaining IRFFI funds, totalling $222 million — which is still quite a significant amount — will be dedicated to supporting Compact projects. So we speak the same language and focus on the same area, placing greater emphasis on Government ownership and the principle of co-financing. That is another key word for 2008, "co-financing". Iraq is a rich country, and it needs to assume ownership of its own projects when the international community gets involved. The only way to do that is through co-financing, which will increase the impact and the efficiency of our projects.

With regard to regional dialogue, Iraq's immediate neighbours have demonstrated their readiness for constructive engagement, especially on border security issues. We need to capitalize on the initial steps. The Secretary-General has encouraged the neighbours to play a supportive role and to use the Baghdad-based ad hoc support mechanism, agreed upon in Istanbul, and to build on the progress made by the working groups. We are also working on that; we have been sending the terms of reference to all the partners and are waiting to discuss with the Government how can we can assist the ad hoc support mechanism even more effectively, perhaps by focusing the next meeting, to be held in Kuwait, on something very concrete in terms of follow-up, such as the issue of refugees and IDPs, which is affecting both Iraq and its neighbours.

How, then, are we planning to further operationalize the delivery of our assistance? The Secretary-General is determined to ensure that the work of all parts of the United Nations system is closely coordinated with that of the Government of Iraq. But in order to be able to identify emerging needs and to respond in a timely fashion in order to meet them, the United Nations requires an increased presence — to which we are committed — as well as an ear on the ground and outreach to the communities.

While the proposal concerning a UNAMI integrated compound is under review in the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and the Fifth Committee, UNAMI is now pre-positioned for an enhanced qualitative and quantitative presence in Iraq. We will come up with a new proposal on a UNAMI integrated compound so that we can proceed swiftly with that. Plans to expand the role of the Erbil Area Office have been set in motion; we need a formal launching in order to produce the needed momentum among ourselves. Improvements to sustain the UNAMI compound have been initiated both in Erbil and in Baghdad while we are waiting for the integrated headquarters, so as not to delay more teams and more colleagues. In addition, national governorate liaison officers will be deployed in nine governorates, so that we can be more in touch with the people of Iraq. Following the completion of one of our own security assessments, two personnel of the United Nations Development Programme are now deployed in Basra, where the United Nations hopes to maintain a small but proactive presence while monitoring security developments there. Last but not least, we are just now sending a preliminary mission to Kirkuk to explore options that will enable us to be present and proactive there, in view of our commitments regarding the follow-up to article 140.

Of course, much is predicated on the security situation. But we are most thankful to those Member States that have answered the call for replenishment of the Trust Fund to Support the Distinct Entity Created to Provide Security for the United Nations Presence in Iraq, which has been helping us to make sure that we can remain there in a secure environment.

What comes next? UNAMI will pursue its core mandate activities, which are not just those I mentioned, but also all the others that are still there. We will be alert for other openings that require timely action, priority adjustment and — if I may say so, as it is not very bureaucratic terminology — an out-of-the-box approach in order to find solutions in Iraq. Electoral assistance remains, the constitutional review process is in the forefront of our activities, and they are linked to many of the things we are already doing and want to do. We will be called to determine the timeliness of countrywide provincial elections, on

which we are working, and the delicate sequencing with other politically sensitive initiatives. We will also continue, carefully but effectively, to monitor the human rights situation in the country, which is provided for under resolution 1770 (2007). By the way, the next human rights report, covering the period 1 July-31 December, will be issued from Baghdad in the coming weeks.

In conclusion, our operating assumptions have broadly not changed, but the way we are implementing them has changed. We are committed to being fast and pragmatic. We should recognize the areas of improvement and marked progress and we should show flexibility in adjusting current and potential priority areas, keeping our proposed structure under constant review, as dictated by the environment. That, of course, presupposes the broadest possible buy-in from the primary stakeholders, as represented in the Security Council, and the confidence and commitment of the international community, which I hope we will be receiving today.

We should remain sensitive and attuned to the needs on the ground and the shifting of debates. We should manage expectations and not be over-optimistic, but at the same time maintain a dose of realism, pragmatism and operationality. We are not unaware of the risks and we do not underestimate the challenges, but we believe, and I believe personally, that including those who are critical, and sometimes even resentful, over what they perceive to be the United Nations past record in Iraq are ready for and welcoming to an energetic, centre-stage role for the United Nations. We are ready for that challenge.

If I may summarize a few points, there have been four positive developments. The first is the security surge. We have noticed that it has produced effects, including a 60 per cent reduction of violence, and in spite of what has happened in Basra — where, by the way, the Iraqi police managed to control the situation, which involved 2.5 million pilgrims, so the situation would have been a challenge for any country in the world. Secondly, there is an economic surge. The International Monetary Fund has told us that there will be a 7 per cent increase every year for the next two years, and 200,000 barrels-worth of sustained new oil income. We are seeing it with our own eyes in the streets of Baghdad; we are seeing it in the eyes of the people when they open new shops. Thirdly, there has been an initial timid but crucial political surge with the law of 12 January. Fourthly, if I may say so, there is also a United Nations surge as we seek to be much more effective in areas of crisis and wherever we can be.

There are, however, two major concerns as well. The first is that all this needs to be sustained, and it can be sustained only by political dialogue. Hence, the urgent need for the other laws that we referred to; hence, the urgent need for an inclusive involvement of others in the Government; hence, the need to make sure that increased income will percolate to the Iraqis through a sense of everyone benefiting from the social services they want to have at last.

The second concern is that time is short. 2008 is an important year. The problem with 2008 is that it is made up of 12 months, like every year. We have not much time and the pressure is on the Iraqis. We are with them and will be with them, but they are in the lead.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. De Mistura for his briefing.

Mr. Khalilzad (United States of America): It is my pleasure to report to today on behalf of the Multinational Forces in Iraq (MNF-I), as requested by Security Council resolutions 1546 (2004), 1637 (2005), 1723 (2006) and 1790 (2007).

I was pleased to hear the report on the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and to see the progress it is making under the leadership of Special Representative De Mistura, particularly in helping to address issues associated with article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution. We look forward to its anticipated contributions to meeting all objectives of resolution 1770 (2007) and appreciate the Secretariat's support for the UNAMI mission.

We are pleased that the Council unanimously adopted resolution 1790 (2007) on 18 December, extending the mandate of MNF-I for another year and allowing Iraq time to achieve the objectives it has set for itself as an independent and sovereign State.

The United States shares with the Iraqi people the goal of achieving a secure, stable and democratic Iraq at peace with itself and its neighbours. It was with that goal in mind one year ago that President Bush approved an increase in our troop strength in Iraq so as to help Iraqis secure the population, isolate extremists, create the conditions for political and economic

progress, and accelerate the transition to Iraqi responsibility.

The continued implementation of the New Way Forward strategy, combined with the surge in overall force levels in Iraq, has considerably improved levels of security during the past quarter. Efforts to enhance population security, such as the establishment of joint security stations in key areas, have enhanced coalition and Iraqi forces' ability to interact with local residents and obtain information on insurgents and illegal militia activities. Improved security is beginning to achieve momentum that, if maintained, may lead to sustained stability. The number of security incidents has fallen significantly and is now at levels last seen in early 2005. Monthly overall attacks — those against Iraqi security forces, civilians, the coalition forces and infrastructure — have been reduced by 60 per cent since June 2007.

The overall reduction in security incidents can be attributed to several factors, including the continued decrease in the capabilities of Al-Qaida in Iraq and militia extremists, increased tribal initiatives against Al-Qaida and other extremists, Muqtada al-Sadr's ceasefire order to his Jaish al-Mahdi militia, the increased capability of Iraqi military and police, and the sustained presence of coalition and Iraqi forces among the population.

Today, we can look back at some of the gains of the surge in MNF-I forces. Let me introduce some specific examples.

The overall number of civilian casualties has declined significantly this quarter and is now below the level of February 2006, prior to the Samarra mosque bombing. Coalition casualty rates have dropped as well, and December 2007 saw the second-lowest death toll of the war going back to May 2003. Another striking trend is the reduction in ethno-sectarian attacks and deaths, both of which decreased over 90 per cent in Baghdad's security districts from January to December 2007. Weekly incidents involving improvised explosive devices (IED) have fallen 68 per cent since the start of Operation Phantom Thunder in late June 2006. That drop in IED incidents may be attributed to the disruption of insurgent networks that has hindered their operational capability. Finally, high-profile attacks in Iraq, such as car bombs and suicide attacks, have declined by over 50 per cent since March 2007.

There are currently 33 countries playing an essential role to support security in Iraq, as part of either coalition or UNAMI operations. Coalition members other than the United States and Iraq contribute approximately 10,300 troops to the coalition and another 450 to support UNAMI. The specific contributions run from major patrolling operations, such as the 1,850-soldier-strong Georgian contingent that operates in Wasit province, to the Albanian contingent guarding an airfield, to the 37-soldier contingent of Bosnians who find and destroy unexploded ordnance. These troops play an indispensable role in the coalition's daily operations and successes in Iraq.

The Government of Iraq is also moving forward to take greater control of the country's security. Iraqi forces conducted a surge of their own in 2007, providing well over 100,000 more Iraqi police and soldiers. As of 24 December 2007, the number of Iraqi Defence and Interior Ministry personnel had risen to 516,646. Ten divisions, 34 brigades and 108 battalions have the lead in counter-insurgency operations in their areas of responsibility — an increase of one brigade and five battalions since last quarter. And of all formed Iraqi armed units, 77 per cent are rated as being able to plan, execute and sustain operations with minimal or no assistance from the coalition forces. The coalition continues to transfer responsibility for security to the Government of Iraq, which now has the lead security responsibly for 9 out of 18 provinces. Prime Minister Al-Maliki has pledged that Iraq will assume security responsibility for the remaining nine provinces by the end of 2008. The provinces under the coalition's security control will continue to transition in the coming months as Iraqi forces demonstrate their readiness to assume this responsibility.

This transition to provincial Iraqi control is proceeding as planned. On 29 October Karbala province made the transition, and on 16 December Basra province did the same. Over the previous four months, Iraqi security forces had maintained their own security and successfully demonstrated their readiness to assume full responsibility over Iraq's second largest city and its environment.

Bottom-up reconciliation in the provinces has made significant advances. Local leaders, both Arab-Sunni and Arab-Shia, are working with coalition forces, provincial reconstruction teams and the

Government of Iraq to improve security and economic conditions in their areas.

There are about 80,000 local citizens who have volunteered to fight against extremists under coalition force supervision in many parts of Iraq. These citizens protect critical infrastructure in their neighbourhoods, and some form neighbourhood watch groups.

Anbar province continues to show dramatic improvement in security. A year ago, Anbar province was the most violent province in Iraq, accounting for more than 25 per cent of all attacks throughout the country. Its citizens grew weary of the violence and turmoil that plagued their province and began to cooperate closely with Iraqi and coalition forces. The Anbar awakening turned the tide in the fight against Al-Qaida in Iraq in the Arab-Sunni tribal areas. Today, local citizens are fighting Al-Qaida and working with coalition and Iraqi forces to bring security to their neighbourhoods. As a result, during this quarter attacks in Anbar plummeted to less than 6 per cent of the total, and life is rapidly returning to normal.

Despite these security gains, foreign terrorists and suicide bombers still enter Iraq through Syria. Syria must do more to stem these flows, including instituting a stricter visa regime, detaining known facilitators, increasing information-sharing with countries of origin and transit and further enhancing border security. The Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps continues to train, equip and fund Shia extremists despite reported assurances to Prime Minister Al-Maliki that Iran will cease lethal aid.

Iraq has come a long way, but much work remains to be done. Looking ahead, we know that Iraq faces challenges in several areas. In 2008, the coalition's four main areas of focus for the Ministries of Defence and Interior and their forces will continue to be: to develop ministerial capacity; to improve the capabilities of the Iraqi forces; to build specific enabling capabilities, including logistics, sustainment and training capabilities; and to support the expansion of the Iraqi forces. Politically, Iraq's leaders need to foster an atmosphere of cooperation and compromise, placing national interests over parochial ones. They must work together to address issues such as corruption and terrorist financing and to pass laws on provincial powers, hydrocarbons and elections, to lay the groundwork for provincial elections that are long overdue.

The Government must also address the mounting problem of corruption, including repairing the damage to the Commission on Public Integrity. This quarter, the Council of Representatives of Iraq overcame significant hurdles to pass the de-Baathification reform bill. This legislation, which would allow many former members of the Baath party to assume positions in Government, took months to achieve and involved considerable compromise and collaboration by many political leaders. The Presidency Council is currently considering the ratification.

Turning to economic issues, Iraqi ministries executed 43 per cent of their capital budget as of 30 September 2007, which is a substantial improvement over full-year 2006 budget execution. This investment in the economy should help to stimulate growth and reduce vulnerability. In many parts of Iraq, the reopening of schools, clinics and markets and improvements in essential services all suggest improvements resulting from hard-fought security gains. Year-on-year inflation fell from 65 per cent in 2006 to 16 per cent through November 2007. The International Monetary Fund projected that Iraq will have modest growth of 1.3 per cent in 2007 but significant improvement in the coming year. In addition, 44 countries agreed to debt-reduction for the Government of Iraq on Paris Club terms.

International and regional engagement also continue to improve. We are grateful for the Secretary-General's participation in the expanded neighbours ministerial meeting, in Istanbul in November 2007, and for UNAMI's offer to support the Government of Iraq in coordinating future meetings. UNAMI has played an important role in the development of the terms of reference for an ad hoc expanded neighbours' support mechanism office to be established in Baghdad. UNAMI's commitment to provide technical assistance and personnel for the office will be elemental to its success and will help the expanded neighbours process to continue to serve as a valuable forum for Iraq and its neighbours to address common security concerns and create opportunities for greater cooperation.

UNAMI has also demonstrated its leadership and its role as co-lead for the International Compact with Iraq and in its support for the United Nations Development Group, which administers one of the Iraq trust funds of the International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq. In recent months, UNAMI has contributed substantially to setting up the secretariat

that is helping Iraq and its donor partners to implement the reforms and initiatives that are called for in the Compact and helping Iraq to achieve economic self-sufficiency.

Iraq is now a different place from one year ago. Much hard work remains, but levels of violence are significantly reduced and solid progress is being made. Hope is returning to Baghdad and returning to towns and villages throughout the country. Iraqis who fled the violence are beginning to return and to rebuild their lives. Some 20,000 Iraqis were able to travel to Mecca by air and ground from 11 December to 7 January to perform the hajj. In preparation for that, the Mosul airport reopened to civilian flights after being closed for several years.

In my remarks today, I have described how tactical and operational momentum is continuing to build. The key to channeling this hard-won momentum into long-term success will be the willingness and ability of national leaders to capitalize upon these local gains, pass and implement remaining key legislation and promote reconciliation. Success in Iraq is important, not only for the Iraqi people, but for Iraq's neighbours, the region and the entire international community. I renew our call upon all parties, particularly Iraq's neighbours, to take concrete steps to sustain this momentum.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): First, I would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. De Mistura, for his briefing on the situation in Iraq and for his presentation of the report on the activities of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). I would also like to express particular gratitude to all the United Nations staff for carrying out their mission in difficult conditions in Iraq today. Moscow has carefully studied the regular report on UNAMI and shares the views and conclusions of that document. We feel it is important to draw attention to the following points.

Resolution 1770 (2007) assigned broad powers to the United Nations in the sphere of helping to make progress in the political process in Iraq. With an emphasis on that important decision, the Mission has been increasing its activities.

It is extremely important that the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General establish constructive contacts with the main political forces in Iraq. The opening of the United Nations regional office in Arbil should also help to promote further enhancement of the Organization's role. The Organization continues today, under critical conditions, to give assistance to Iraqis in such areas as the development of a national constitution, preparation for elections, humanitarian assistance and the introduction of human rights standards.

However, it is clear that the full implementation and realization of the unique potential of the United Nations will be possible only with a radical improvement of the situation in Iraq in terms of security. The report's mention of a decline in the level of violence throughout the country is reassuring. Indeed, the situation has stabilized, to a certain extent. The political forces of Iraq have themselves played a decisive role in that regard, displaying a high degree of responsibility. The positive trends we have noted should be encouraged in every way possible. Only on a platform of a reduction of violence and a shift to political methods for resolving vital problems can the key task of the Iraqi settlement, namely national reconciliation, be achieved.

Iraq's regional neighbours are of fundamental importance in improving the situation. We note the positive dynamics in that regard. The mechanism of holding permanent meetings between Iraq and neighbouring States should be actively developed. We also note with satisfaction the information contained in the report on the establishment of constructive relations between the Iraqi Government, Syria and Iran and the increasingly effective efforts to monitor the Syrian-Iraqi border. The Government of Jordan is taking important steps.

All of that shows the possibilities of a broad dialogue between neighbouring countries, with a view to stabilizing the situation in Iraq and in the region as a whole. Constructive regional cooperation, together with a mechanism for international support with the participation of Iraq's neighbours, the United Nations, Egypt, Bahrain, the Group of Eight, the European Union and the five permanent members of the Security Council, must give additional impetus to the political settlement in Iraq. Complex challenges require collective responses.

However, declaring victory is premature. There is no guarantee that the reduction in tensions noted in the report will continue. The wave of violence that has

swept the country recently confirms our fears. We stress that solving the problems linked with the civil conflict in Iraq will be possible only through real national dialogue aimed at overcoming mutual rejection and distrust.

The political process in Iraq, as rightly indicated in the report, is marking time. We note the steps taken by the Iraqi Government to improve the situation in the country, but in order for those measures to be effective, they must receive the approval of the Iraqi political forces and, of course, actually help to resolve the problem of national reconciliation. In that sphere, the role of the United Nations in establishing a broad dialogue and consultations is irreplaceable.

A great deal of work remains to be done in the area of forming viable military structures in the Iraqi army. We noted the steps listed in the briefing by the United States on behalf of the Multinational Force and the steps taken by the coalition in that area. The report of the Secretary-General talks about the creation of "Awakening Councils". In fact, Iraq does not need new non-governmental armed groups, but rather a strong and independent national army and police. It is they, and not various kinds of militias, who should ultimately support security and order in the country, after the withdrawal of the Multinational Force contingent from Iraq.

We are particularly concerned by the humanitarian situation in Iraq. The crisis in that area has not been overcome. The difficulties in ensuring vitally important services to the population are still huge. Several million refugees and internally displaced persons still cannot return to their home regions.

There is notably less information on the human rights situation in the report before us than in the previous report, and there is nothing said about whether the Mission is following, as it did previously, the fate of those persons detained by the Multinational Force and by Iraqi bodies or about the situation in prisons and places of detention. Of course, we carefully studied the report on human rights, which, as Mr. De Mistura announced today, will soon be published in Baghdad. However, we still believe that in the next report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the Mission, humanitarian and human rights issues must be given far more attention.

We share the concern expressed in the report relating to the arbitrary conduct of private security companies. Those structures are outside international humanitarian law. Moreover, they cause grave damage to the relations between civilizations. We again repeat that the activities of those structures must be brought within a strict framework in the next deployment in the country.

We are carefully following the efforts of UNAMI to resolve the problems in Kirkuk, and we hope that they will yield positive results. To prevent the worsening of those problems, the Mission should continue its efforts to establish constructive dialogue between all political forces involved.

We note that the main area of United Nations activities in Iraq, as indicated in the report, remains solving the task of ensuring national reconciliation and supporting sovereignty and territorial integrity throughout the country. The achievement of those goals must be built upon the future withdrawal from Iraq of all foreign military contingents. The restoration of stability in Iraq is, above all, a matter for the Iraqis themselves. Members of the international community, and Russia among them, can and must help them in this. We are ready to participate further in actively preparing and implementing any initiatives aimed at helping to establish broad internal Iraqi dialogue, achieving national reconciliation and strengthening the real role of the international community in resolving the situation in the country. The United Nations has a fundamental role to play in that regard.

Mr. Ripert (France) (*spoke in French*): First of all, I would like to thank Mr. De Mistura for his briefing and to welcome the activity of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) as a whole.

The new Special Representative of the Secretary-General has already provided a glimpse of his talents by playing the crucial role of facilitator in the implementation of article 140 of the constitution. That made it possible to decrease tensions and to achieve agreement on deferring the referendum on the status of Kirkuk for six months. In the difficult context that we have seen, France provides its full support to the activities of UNAMI in the implementation of its mandate, as reinforced by resolution 1770 (2007).

Iraq today still faces major political, security, humanitarian and economic challenges. Those challenges do carry considerable risks for the region,

especially for neighbouring countries, and beyond for the international community as a whole.

We very largely agree with the analysis of the situation set out in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2008/19). Violence has declined in recent months, and we cannot fail to be pleased at the hope that the trend will continue. Despite the progress, however, violence remains at too high a level; this engenders a lack of security and a very poor humanitarian situation. The 4 million refugees and internally displaced persons continue to be a source of major concern, and we must act swiftly on that issue. Here, we again hail the generosity of neighbouring States that are hosting many refugees. Along with its partners in the European Union, France continues to play its role in international efforts, including those of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, to assist refugees and internally displaced persons.

The Secretary-General stresses above all that improvements in the security situation can be sustainable only if bolstered by parallel progress in the political sphere. As the report of the Secretary-General indicates, and despite the Iraqi parliament's welcome adoption of the Justice and Accountability Law on 12 January, the internal political process remains deadlocked. It is therefore important that major texts such as the hydrocarbons package and the electoral reform bill be adopted and that they be accompanied by a process of political dialogue and national reconciliation. It is also important that the Iraqi authorities continue their political reforms in line with the provisions of the International Compact with Iraq, which was launched in May 2007. We hope that implementation of the Compact can contribute to the emergence of an inclusive political process. France fully supports the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and of the new Special Representative, and will contribute to that process.

In our national capacity, we are always striving to offer ideas that can help Iraqis attain their objective of reconciliation. Hence, we have proposed to host, in a dispassionate atmosphere and on neutral ground, a conference of inter-Iraqi understanding, which would be as broad-based as possible. It is, of course, for the protagonists, if need be, to consider any follow-up to that proposal.

The neighbouring States process launched in May 2007 at Sharm el-Sheikh is an important mechanism for reconstruction and stability in Iraq. The ministerial meeting held at Istanbul on 2 and 3 November was an important step in this process, a process that must continue and that must result in concrete decisions. We support the proposal that the Secretary-General made in Istanbul, that the Government of Iraq establish a support mechanism for the neighbouring States process with a view to increasing its effectiveness. We are also pleased with action to strengthen the United Nations presence throughout the territory of Iraq, whether in Arbil, in Basra or in various governorates, through the appointment of liaison officers. France also favours a strengthened international presence and the launch of projects that are intended to spread throughout the country beginning with the regions that are more stable in terms of security. In our view, specific initiatives in areas such as health could be implemented very rapidly. In parallel to our support for United Nations action, my country will also work to open an Arbil satellite of our embassy in Iraq.

The role of the international community is to support all efforts that can contribute to the unity, sovereignty and integrity of a democratic Iraq that respects diversity. In that regard, France fully supports action by the United Nations to implement the various elements of the UNAMI mandate. Only with the support of the entire international community can the Iraqi people regain the peace and security to which they are entitled.

Mr. Kafando (Burkina Faso) (*spoke in French*): The Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, has just presented the report of the Secretary-General on Iraq (S/2008/19), specifically on the fulfilment of the responsibilities of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), submitted pursuant to resolution 1770 (2007). We are grateful to Mr. De Mistura for his comprehensive overview of the situation in Iraq, on which we congratulate him; we encourage him to continue his efforts. He can count on the Council's support as he works to successfully carry out his mission, which could hardly be more sensitive.

We take particular note of three major concerns expressed in the report: the security situation in the country; the process of political normalization; and the assistance role of the United Nations.

On the first point, despite the unswerving determination of the Iraqi Government to limit the cycle of violence, we note that, unfortunately, the efforts appear to be at a standstill. Yet we are reassured to note that this state of affairs is not a result of the authorities' inability to bring calm to the country, but of an inability to control certain factors that fall within the category of internal political management. Nevertheless, the general assessment is that there has been a tangible reduction of violence, even though tribal confrontations, religious clashes, etc., continue. Such praiseworthy elements — which are undoubtedly a result of joint action by the Multinational Force and the civil defence units and of increased cooperation between the Government and some other countries of the region on security and respect for the ceasefire — deserve high tribute.

Turning to the political process, despite recent difficulties, we welcome the signing of the memorandum of understanding between the Government of Iraq, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, the Iraqi Islamic Party and the Kurdistan Democratic Party, as well as initiatives by the Government to cooperate with its neighbours on matters of internal stability, border security and the voluntary return of refugees. On the ground, the population is offering increasingly visible support for the Government's actions, which accounts for the resumption of some public services in the context of efforts to redeploy the administration. It almost goes without saying that all of these achievements are encouraging and augur well for the revitalization of State institutions, which would be the best guarantee of optimal stabilization in Iraq.

In terms of the activities of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, we feel nothing but satisfaction at the outcomes achieved under the auspices of the Special Representative, including the dialogue with governmental, political, diplomatic and religious authorities aimed at easing tension in the political life of the country, and at the good cooperation with the Iraqi authorities aimed at establishing an ad hoc support mechanism for the expanded group of neighbouring States. We also welcome the facilitation role played by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General with a view, under article 140 of the Iraqi constitution, to organizing a referendum leading to a consensus decision on the status of Kirkuk and on difficulties relating to internal boundaries. Broadly speaking, we appreciate UNAMI's efforts to support the Government in revising the constitution and to help it to organize future elections.

Finally, in the humanitarian sphere, we note with great interest and satisfaction the outcomes that have already been achieved. But we should encourage UNAMI to do much more, in particular by extending its operations to other areas of Iraq, such as Basra and Arbil, in order to help displaced persons, and by increasing its assistance to vulnerable groups, if possible with the collaboration of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other international humanitarian organizations.

In conclusion, we reaffirm our solidarity with the Secretary-General and his Special Representative in connection with the focus they intend to place on the issue of Iraq. The Government of Iraq must be responsive to that concern. It is for that reason that we urge it to ratify, as soon as possible, the status of mission agreement, which defines relations between Iraq and the United Nations.

We are following the question of Iraq's reconstruction with great interest. We therefore fully support the International Compact with Iraq.

Sir John Sawers (United Kingdom): I would like to join colleagues in welcoming Mr. De Mistura to the Council and in thanking him for his presentation of the Secretary-General's report (S/2008/19). I would also like to thank Ambassador Khalilzad for his presentation on behalf of the Multinational Force in Iraq, to which the United Kingdom remains the second-largest contributor.

The United Kingdom reaffirms its support for the work of Mr. De Mistura and the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) in the implementation of the Mission's expanded mandate, as set out in resolution 1770 (2007). We welcome in particular the intensive dialogue that UNAMI has pursued on the subject of Kirkuk, helping the main political stakeholders to forge a preliminary consensus on the way ahead. We encourage Iraqis to work closely with UNAMI to ensure that the process to agree upon the future status of disputed areas is transparent and inclusive and that it promotes stability in Iraq.

As the Secretary-General has set out in his report, UNAMI and United Nations agencies have undertaken to work more coherently in the delivery of

humanitarian assistance and development aid. In that context, we look forward to the launch of the United Nations consolidated appeal to provide support to vulnerable groups.

As Ambassador Khalilzad reported, on 16 December 2007 security responsibility for Basra province passed from the Multinational Force to Iraqi control, thereby completing the transfer of security responsibility in the four southern provinces of Iraq previously under the security control of the United Kingdom-led multinational division. That was a major step forward and reflected the confidence of the Multinational Force and the Government of Iraq in the growing capacity of the Iraqi security forces, as well as the improving trend in the security situation in Basra.

The overall level of violence in the south-east has dropped in recent months. But there was an outbreak of violence and loss of life in Basra and Nasiriyah on 18 January, which we condemn. Those attacks were intended to create disorder in the cities, and there can be no justification for them. The British Government congratulates Iraqi security forces in their handling of the violence. That was their first major test in Basra since the transfer of security responsibility to Iraqi control. They acted professionally and with confidence and determination.

We emphasize that handing back lead responsibility for security in Basra to the Iraqi Government does not mark the end of the United Kingdom's involvement in Iraq but, rather, moves our relationship with the Iraqi Government and the people of Iraq, and of Basra in particular, into a new phase. We will continue to support the people and the Government of Iraq as they forge a more secure and prosperous future based on principles of democracy and national reconciliation. We welcome UNAMI's plans, as set out by the Special Representative, to re-engage in Basra and to re-establish a presence there, and we will support the mission as it does so.

As the Secretary-General's report sets out, and as Ambassador Khalilzad and the Special Representative have emphasized, the second half of 2007 saw welcome progress in terms of Iraq's security, in part as a result of the Iraqi population's rejection of extremism and extremist groups. To be sustained, that progress on security will have to go hand in hand with progress on political reconciliation. Each is indispensable to the other. Iraqis should drive reconciliation forward. The international community will stand by them to help facilitate and support it.

We continue to encourage Iraq's political leaders to work with each other in a spirit of collegiality and to build on existing agreements, to strengthen participation and decision-making, to improve the performance of Government and to facilitate the passing of laws. To that end, we welcome the approval by the Council of Representatives of the revised law on de-Baathification and the law on pensions as steps very much in the right direction. We echo, however, the Secretary-General's observation that more needs to be done to meet the challenges of reviewing and adopting a constitution acceptable to all Iraqis and passing legislation on provincial powers, elections and hydrocarbons. Success in those areas will require leadership from the Government of Iraq and the willingness of all political parties to work effectively together in the national interest within the Council of Representatives.

On the contribution of the region to supporting progress within Iraq, we commend the agreement reached at the Iraq neighbours meeting in Istanbul in November to establish an Iraqi-led support mechanism for the neighbours process, with United Nations support. The support mechanism now needs to begin to work as soon as possible to help to translate the commitments made by participants in the neighbours process into concrete outcomes. I might say that that applies in particular to countries from which insurgents continue to pass into Iraq.

At the international level, the United Kingdom remains committed to supporting Iraq through ad hoc forums such as the expanded neighbours' ministerial process and the European Union.

Mr. Liu Zhenmin (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Chinese delegation wishes to thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, for his briefing. We also welcome the briefing provided by Ambassador Khalilzad on behalf of the Multinational Force (MNF).

Thanks to the joint efforts of the Iraqi Government and the other parties concerned, the level of violence across the whole of Iraq has continued to decline as the security situation has steadily improved. In order to consolidate those hard-earned results, the Iraqi Government and the various factions in Iraq must work together and seek progress in areas such as

political dialogue, improving legislation, enhancing accountability, protecting human rights and ensuring economic development and speedy reconstruction. The prospect of a promising future for Iraq hinges on whether all of Iraq's political leaders will place the national interest above all else in order to seek a common understanding and cooperation.

We are pleased to note that the relationship between Iraq and the other countries of the region is being further strengthened and that cooperation is growing on matters pertaining to economic reconstruction, border control and refugees. The expanded meeting of neighbouring States of Iraq, held in Istanbul last November, decided to establish an ad hoc support mechanism, which has made us very hopeful about the prospects for future cooperation. Strengthened cooperation between Iraq and the other countries of the region is in the interest of Iraq, as well as in the interest of all the countries of the region. The international community must therefore fully acknowledge, encourage and support the efforts and work of Iraq and all the parties concerned.

The mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), as set out in resolution 1770 (2007), is being implemented gradually and has produced positive results. We expect UNAMI to play a unique role and to contribute to the process of stability and development in Iraq, in order that the Iraqi people may genuinely enjoy real benefits in that regard.

Confronted with a complex political and security situation, UNAMI must strengthen its consultations with the Government of Iraq and explore ways and means to improve the situation. At the same time, it should seek to gain wide acceptance and trust among the Iraqi population at large. At the moment, its focus is on facilitating in-depth dialogue between various Iraqi factions with regard to the main issues of the political process and on finding common understanding. At the same time, we hope that the Government of Iraq and the MNF will be able to provide security safeguards for UNAMI.

Bringing stability to the situation in Iraq and placing the process of reconstruction and reconciliation on the right track at an early date are tasks confronting both Iraq and the international community as a whole. We call upon the international community to continue to extend a helping hand to the Iraqi people and to stand ready to provide all useful assistance in that regard.

Mr. Natalegawa (Indonesia): First of all, I would like to join previous speakers in thanking Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, for his comprehensive briefing. My delegation also thanks the Permanent Representative of the United States for his statement on behalf of the Multinational Force.

The people of Iraq, like those of other nations, have every right to live in a secure and stable country. While remaining concerned over continued bomb attacks, Indonesia draws encouragement from signs of improvement in security, indicated by the steady decline in overall violence across Iraq over the past few months. We commend the efforts of the Iraqi Government to promote security and stability. We also commend the ceasefire declaration by some parties in Iraq, which has also contributed to the decrease in violence in the country. My delegation believes that all parties concerned recognize the importance of making additional efforts to achieve a permanent ceasefire, which is essential to the realization of durable peace in the country.

Capable and well-equipped Iraqi army and internal security forces are important for the realization of peace and stability in the country. We welcome the continued progress made in training, equipping and capacity-building of the Iraqi security forces. We attach great importance to the day when the Iraqi forces assume full responsibility for the maintenance of security and stability in Iraq, which will eventually allow for the gradual withdrawal of the Multinational Force, towards the end of its presence in Iraq.

Peace in Iraq also requires political stability, unity and consensus. Indonesia therefore underlines the need for all parties to set aside differences and promote dialogue in order to break the political impasse. One way in which political consensus can be fostered is with regard to constitutional issues. While resolving such issues will not guarantee a well-functioning political process in Iraq, their resolution will provide added stability and credibility for the Iraqi authorities as well as positive momentum. They are ingredients that can ensure greater efficacy of the political process in the long run.

Unity at the societal level is also key to achieving a durable peace in Iraq. Dialogue among religious,

political and ethnic groups remains pertinent. The formation of the National Iraqi Gathering by a group of Sadrist activists, aimed at promoting tolerance and dialogue with other groups, is commendable.

Given the Diwaniyah incident in October 2007, which involved competing Shiite militias, intrareligious dialogue is no less important than interreligious dialogue in Iraq. In that regard, Indonesia welcomes the signing of an agreement by the Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council and the Sadrist Trend to prevent further violence between their supporters. We also welcome the convening of the first national forum for Islamic scholars on 27 November 2007 and the cleric-led initiatives aimed at reducing tensions between Sunnis and Shiites.

Developments in Iraq have been shaped not only by the dynamics inside the country, but also by the situation in its regional and international milieus. Neighbouring States can play an important role in creating a regional environment conducive to reconstruction efforts and the promotion of peace and stability in Iraq. In that regard, we welcome the fourth annual meeting of interior ministers of Iraq's neighbouring States, held in Kuwait on 23 October 2007.

Indonesia supports an approach that promotes regional cooperation on security issues with regard to Iraq. We are heartened by the recent efforts of neighbouring countries to reach out for greater involvement in regional stability, including the recent expanded meeting of the foreign ministers of the neighbouring countries of Iraq, held in Istanbul on 2 and 3 November 2007, at which internal stability, border security and expanded cooperation processes were discussed. We also recognize the important role that Iran and Syria have played in promoting cooperation with Iraq in areas such as economic and security cooperation.

Cooperation with neighbouring countries is also essential in addressing the humanitarian challenges of Iraqi refugees. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimates that 2.2 million Iraqis have fled to neighbouring countries, with 44 per cent of that number in Syria and Jordan and 9 per cent in other Middle Eastern countries.

My delegation continues to recognize the increasing responsibility of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), in accordance with Security Council resolution 1770 (2007). We underline the importance of ensuring a balance between this expanded role and the availability of adequate resources. Indonesia therefore supports the intention of the Secretary-General to closely review every aspect of UNAMI's work, in order to determine how progress can be made in implementing the expanded mandate that it was given in resolution 1770 (2007).

We support the engagement of UNAMI in discussions with relevant authorities in Iraq in order to prevent the lapse of the deadline set out in article 140 of the Iraqi constitution from causing further violence. We also support UNAMI's technical assistance to the Government of Iraq to make progress in deciding the future of some of the disputed territories.

Finally, I wish to reaffirm Indonesia's full support for UNAMI and its work in Iraq.

Mr. Le Luong Minh (Viet Nam): At the outset, I would like to join previous speakers in thanking Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, for his introduction of the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) (S/2008/19). I thank the Secretary-General for his report. I also thank Ambassador Khalilzad, Permanent Representative of the United States, for his briefing.

The report of the Secretary-General presents us with a mixed overall picture of the situation in Iraq during the reporting period. On the bright side, my delegation is pleased to note that, despite extremely difficult circumstances, the people of Iraq have persevered in the political transition process set out in resolution 1546 (2004) and have entered a new phase of striving for unity, stability and development. The marked reduction in the number of violent incidents, the gradual assumption by the Iraqi authorities of the control of competencies in the area of security, the process of implementing article 140 of the constitution and the reinforcement of the Jaysh al-Mahdi ceasefire are positive developments.

On the dark side, my delegation shares the concerns of the Secretary-General about the daunting challenges that the people of Iraq still face in the quest for peace, security and development. Attacks against civilians, outbreaks of sectarian strife, the lack of consensus in promulgating key legislative documents, the escalation of border tension and the worsening

humanitarian and human rights situation, with the plight of nearly 4 million refugees and internally displaced persons unresolved, continue to pose serious challenges to the Government and the people of Iraq.

In the present situation, the role of the United Nations in Iraq with regard to the political process, constitutional support, electoral assistance and, in particular, humanitarian assistance and national reconciliation is even more important. We commend the World Food Programme, the World Health Organization, UNICEF, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, the United Nations Population Fund, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and other United Nations agencies for the activities that they are undertaking in Iraq under what the Secretary-General describes as extremely difficult conditions.

Viet Nam highly appreciates and supports the efforts undertaken by UNAMI in the implementation of its expanded mandate under resolution 1770 (2007). At the political level, we support the efforts by the parties concerned to advance the political process and to promote national dialogue and reconciliation. We remain convinced that reinforcing the constitutional review process, disbanding militias and armed groups, curbing the illicit use of weapons and improving the livelihoods of civilians and the conditions of refugees and displaced persons, as well as strengthening the rule of law, are among the most important measures that can help Iraq to tackle existing problems.

On the economic front, we encourage the Government of Iraq to undertake specific measures with a view to achieving tangible results in the areas of poverty reduction, the provision of public services, job creation and institutional strengthening. In our view, those are essential to creating a sound basis for the reconstruction work to be effective and sustainable.

We reaffirm our support for the activities undertaken within the framework of the International Compact with Iraq. In the implementation of its expanded mandate, UNAMI should continue to assist Iraq to undertake those measures effectively.

My delegation is encouraged by the efforts of Iraq to strengthen constructive cooperation and dialogue with regional countries on economic, security, energy and humanitarian issues. We share the assessment that the reduction in the number of violent incidents in September, October and November last year was partially due to the increase in such cooperation. We hope that this type of cooperation and dialogue will take place not only with Iran and Syria, but also with other neighbouring countries concerned with a view to easing border tensions, preventing further hostilities and resolving humanitarian issues.

In the context of continued difficulties in almost every field, the role of the international community in general and of the regional countries in particular remains instrumental in helping Iraq respond to various security, humanitarian, national reconciliation and socio-economic development challenges. Viet Nam will continue to support the political process in Iraq and the efforts of the parties concerned aimed at restoring the peace, stability, unity and prosperity of Iraq. We support the efforts of the Iraqi people in rebuilding their country and look forward to developing political, economic and commercial relations with Iraq when conditions permit.

Mr. Kumalo (South Africa): We, too, wish to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, for his briefing on the report before us, as well as Ambassador Khalilzad of the United States for his briefing on the activities of the Multinational Force in Iraq (MNF-I).

While we welcome the decrease in the level of violence in Iraq, my delegation remains concerned that the security situation there remains precarious. The Secretary-General reports that there are approximately 90 security incidents a day, which is unacceptable. In fact, the Secretary-General also cautions that

> "mass casualty attacks on civilians, such as the triple car bombing in Amarah on 12 December and the series of attacks at the end of December, are a sobering reminder that those using terrorism in pursuit of their political aims have no regard for human rights or human life" (*S/2008/19, para. 68*).

We wish to reiterate that any resolution to the conflict in Iraq has to include an all-inclusive political process and national reconciliation, as well as constructive dialogue with all neighbouring States. The adoption of the Justice and Accountability Law is welcome as a step towards reconciling different parties. It is our hope that the Iraqi parties will continue to find ways to further reconcile. The role of regional actors cannot be overemphasized, and my

delegation supports efforts aimed at addressing the violence, internally displaced persons and refugees. We view positively the series of discussions between Iraq and all of its neighbours, working in partnership to ensure stability, security and economic reconstruction in the region. Regional cooperation is necessary to ensuring stability not only for Iraq, but for the entire region as well.

My delegation recently supported the adoption of resolution 1790 (2007), renewing the mandate of MNF-I, because the Iraqi Government is of the view that its continued presence will be necessary for security. We note the Iraqi Government's expectation that this could be the final mandate renewal of the MNF-I. Resolution 1790 (2007) also extends the mandate of the International Advisory and Monitoring Board. South Africa welcomes that decision, but remains concerned that repeated findings of serious irregularities with regard to the disbursement of funds from the Development Fund for Iraq and the oversight of all oil sales and contracts have not been acted upon. The decision to hold a long-overdue meeting of the Security Council to discuss the findings of the independent auditors attached to the International Advisory and Monitoring Board is therefore welcome.

The current mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq in terms of resolution 1770 (2007) is testimony to the international community's determination to assist the Iraq people to move beyond the current crisis. My delegation strongly supports an expanded United Nations role in Iraq, in line with our commitment to multilateralism and conflict resolution. The United Nations has a particularly important role to play with regard to national reconciliation in Iraq. As the Secretary-General has previously indicated, not only does the United Nations enjoy good relations with all parties across the political spectrum in Iraq, but it also has the advantage of relying on past best practices gained from operating in other global conflicts. However, it should be stressed that, with regard to a more direct role of the United Nations, as resolution 1770 (2007) itself implies, the expanded role foreseen in the resolution can be realized only as circumstances permit. The safety of United Nations personnel has to be an overriding consideration.

We once again reiterate that, notwithstanding the events that led to the current situation, the Security Council has a responsibility to ensure that the powers granted to the Multinational Force are exercised in a manner consistent with the decisions of the Council, that Iraq's natural resources and funds in the Development Fund for Iraq are used for the benefit of the Iraqi people, and that international law and human rights are upheld and respected by all parties.

Mrs. Mladineo (Croatia): Let me join others in welcoming the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, and in thanking him for his briefing to the Council.

We also thank Ambassador Khalilzad for his statement on the activities of the Multinational Force in Iraq (MNF-I).

Mr. De Mistura's mission is a demanding one, and he has our full support. We remain confident that he will successfully advance the objectives set out in resolution 1770 (2007). We also believe that the United Nations is uniquely placed to extend assistance to the Government of Iraq in consolidating Government institutions, promoting political dialogue and national reconciliation, and engaging the neighbouring countries. That said, I would like to express our appreciation for the efforts of Mr. De Mistura's predecessor, Mr. Qazi.

As Croatia joins the Council debate on Iraq, the security indicators are encouraging, testifying to a significant drop in violence. We welcome the combined effort of the Iraqi security forces and MNF-I and hope that this positive trend is continued and expanded. However, as the Secretary-General's report notes, the recent string of violent attacks is a sobering reminder of the precarious security situation in the country. Over the past years, Iraq has suffered a massive human toll. Croatia deplores attacks against civilians. Among the multiple challenges Iraq is facing, improving the security and human rights situation should remain a priority.

While continuing violence impedes nation-building, the reverse is equally true: without serious advances in the political process, recent improvements in the security situation might be lost. We share the assessment in the report of the Secretary-General that the pace of the political process has not shown the needed degree of progress, and we appeal to the Iraqi leaders to engage genuinely on core political issues.

The constitutional revision process, legislation on hydrocarbon resources and the implementation of article 140 of the constitution remain the main

challenges for moving forward. We note with satisfaction the recent adoption of the long awaited Justice and Accountability Law and hope it will be used to advance national reconciliation. It is equally important to continue the positive trends in regional cooperation. The developing dynamic of the expanded neighbours conference is reassuring, and we salute the outcome of the expanded ministerial meeting of neighbouring States held in Istanbul last November. The stabilization of Iraq is largely dependent on the constructive engagement of those countries which share borders with Iraq, and continued dialogue is of utmost importance.

The growing humanitarian crisis is a matter of grave concern. In addition to the fact that the number of refugees and displaced persons is increasing, the continuing violence puts the goal of meeting their basic food needs at risk. We salute the efforts of United Nations agencies in the field, notably the operations of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNICEF, the United Nations Development Programme and the World Food Programme and pay tribute to neighbouring countries which have extended their help.

The challenges faced by Iraq do not respect borders and generate risks not only to neighbouring countries, but also to the wider region and beyond. We believe that success in Iraq requires collective effort and focused commitment. We agree with Mr. De Mistura that the United Nations is ready for an energetic, centre-stage role in Iraq. UNAMI deserves our full and continuing support. We commend the efforts of the United Nations personnel who continue to carry out their duties and to work on expanding the United Nations presence under dangerous circumstances.

Mr. Mantovani (Italy): First of all I wish to thank Special Representative De Mistura and Ambassador Khalilzad for their briefings. As this is the first time that Mr. De Mistura has briefed the Council since the assumption of his role as Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, I wish to congratulate him on the work he has already done — showing a very pragmatic approach — and to wish him all success in his future endeavours in Iraq.

We would also like to express our appreciation for the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2008/19) and for the informative insights that he has provided on the situation in Iraq. Italy fully appreciates and supports the steadfast commitment of the United Nations in Iraq, recently strengthened by the new and broader mandate given by resolution 1770 (2007) to the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and to Special Representative De Mistura.

We have always supported the role of the United Nations in facilitating and sustaining national reconciliation and the political process in Iraq, through the dialogue that the Special Representative of the Secretary-General maintains with a whole range of Iraqi political actors and civil society representatives, and also through the technical assistance provided by the mission in the electoral and constitutional fields.

In this framework, we welcome the extension of the breadth and scope of UNAMI action favouring the correct implementation of article 140 of the Iraqi constitution, which has been extensively illustrated in the most recent report of the Secretary-General.

With regard to the humanitarian situation, we continue to be extremely concerned by the high number of Iraqi refugees in neighbouring countries and of internally displaced persons in Iraq. We commend the efforts to address this situation by the countries that have received the Iraqi refugees and by the United Nations. For its part, Italy responded to last July's joint appeal of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and UNICEF with more than $4.2 million for activities to benefit Iraqi refugees and internally displaced persons in Iraq, Syria and Jordan.

In his report, the Secretary-General also mentioned activities supporting Iraqi reconstruction through the use of funds from the International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq. In this regard, I would like to provide some information on the progress of the Italian Co-Presidency of the Facility's Donor Committee in aligning its action plan with the priorities highlighted by the national development strategy within the framework of the International Compact with Iraq.

As a follow-up to the meeting held in Baghdad on 8 December, we have called informal meetings, which are going to take place in Italy in the next few days, with the participation of Iraqi Government representatives, United Nations agencies and the World Bank, as well as major donors committed to Iraqi reconstruction that already have their facilities on the ground.

These meetings will also precede the half-yearly meeting of the Donor Committee, scheduled to take place in Baghdad in late March. The aim is to create as many synergies as possible on the ground — both at central and local levels — through the optimization of existing facilities and the use of coordination mechanisms provided by the International Compact for Iraq. Such an example is the Iraq Consultative Group, whose first meeting, Italy believes, should take place before the scheduled meeting of the Reconstruction Fund Facility's Donor Committee.

Mr. Soler Torrijos (Panama) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, allow me to express my thanks for this morning's briefing and to welcome the appointment of Mr. Staffan de Mistura as Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq. We wish him every success in the delicate task entrusted to him. We have faith in his ability to act out of the box when it is timely and prudent. We are optimistic about the increasingly broad commitment of the international community, in particular the commitment of the neighbouring countries in the region, to reconstruction and stability in Iraq. A few months ago we witnessed the strengthening of the International Compact for Iraq with additional elements, and we now have the outcomes of the recent ministerial meetings, in Kuwait and Istanbul. These are acknowledgements that building peace in Iraq requires increased efforts towards dialogue and social development.

From Panama's point of view, the slow progress of the political process in Iraq has become an obstacle to the strengthening of the country's most important political and social institutions. However, we have faith that the Iraqi leaders will be able to overcome their political disagreements in order to reach a consensus on the nature and structure of their State.

Last October's report on the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) (S/2007/608) described the serious humanitarian situation in the country resulting from sectarian violence. The number of internally displaced persons has increased by 16 per cent in recent months and it is increasingly urgent to achieve proper and stable conditions so that the millions of displaced Iraqis can return to their homes.

We are somewhat concerned by the organization of civilians into so-called Awakening Councils. These irregular armed groups should be supervised with particular attention, even when they are credited with having partially reduced violence in some parts of Iraq. Their legal and operational parameters must be clear as well as the responsibilities under which they operate. Panama favours the efforts of the Government of Iraq to integrate these units into the regular security forces.

It is a good time for the Security Council to think about the role it should play in resolving the political and humanitarian crisis in Iraq. Our delegation is optimistic about reports indicating that violence has been somewhat reduced. The expanded mandate of UNAMI adopted in resolution 1770 (2007) was an important step in achieving more active and focused United Nations participation in this endeavour.

Panama reiterates its best wishes to the new Special Representative and urges him to continue his efforts to promote an inclusive political dialogue that will lead to lasting reconciliation for the Iraqi people.

Mr. Verbeke (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): I would like to begin by thanking the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, for his first briefing and for the impact he has already had on the work of the United Nations in Iraq. I also thank Ambassador Khalilzad for his briefing on behalf of the Multinational Force.

My delegation, like others, notes with satisfaction that the security situation in Iraq continues to improve. The decline in sectarian violence and terrorist attacks is encouraging because this improvement in security is increasingly the fruit of the efforts of all Iraqi communities together, and because it was recently accompanied by political acts that could potentially give Iraqis confidence in dialogue.

Following the adoption of the Justice and Accountability Law, which Mr. De Mistura rightly highlighted, we hope that similar progress will be achieved in other areas, such as the management of hydrocarbon resources, the implementation of article 140 of the constitution and the revision of the constitution. The Constitution is, indeed, the only tool capable of giving Iraqis confidence in a strong State that guarantees each community its right to participate in a common future.

The international community must continue to encourage efforts in that direction, primarily, of course, by helping to tangibly improve the living conditions of Iraqis, but also by supporting the Iraqi Government's efforts to strengthen its cooperation with its immediate

neighbours. The Sharm el-Sheik and Istanbul ministerial meetings yielded tangible results on the question of refugees and border security. We hope that agreement on the meeting to be held in Kuwait, on the establishment of the three working groups and on the ad hoc support mechanism will make it possible to consolidate those gains.

I would like to stress the driving role played by the United Nations in Iraq despite the constraints imposed by the security situation. In that context, I would like to reiterate Belgium's full support for the Secretary-General and his Special Representative in their determination to enable the United Nations to play the strengthened role assigned to it through resolution 1770 (2007).

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): Before making a statement in my capacity as representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, I would like to inform members of the Security Council that the delegation of Costa Rica has requested to make its statement following the statement by the representative of Iraq.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya.

At the outset, I would like to express my thanks to Mr. Staffan de Mistura, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, for his briefing. I commend his efforts and those of his predecessor and of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). I would also like to express my thanks to Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad for his briefing to the Security Council on the activities of the Multinational Force in Iraq.

We fully realize that conditions in Iraq today are the direct result of the siege and the subsequent invasion and occupation through which the occupation forces destroyed the country's political, administrative and cultural institutions. That, in turn, led to the current situation of which we are all fully aware.

We are also aware that the Iraqi people themselves bear primary responsibility for stemming the bloodshed in Iraq and ensuring its territorial integrity, sovereignty, independence and control over its natural resources — and, indeed, for ensuring the participation of all its citizens in national affairs, with no sector of the population being marginalized. They are fully able to shoulder that responsibility. We believe that the role of the international community and of Iraq's immediate neighbours must be to promote dialogue and reconciliation, defusing all tensions among Iraqis.

Furthermore, reconciliation and dialogue among Iraqis require the clear prospect of an end to the occupation. We believe that the occupation is a major bone of contention among Iraqi factions. Here, we believe that UNAMI has a central role to play in promoting dialogue and reconciliation and defusing tensions. That role inevitably proceeds from the need for national reconciliation and for stability in all sectors, including, in particular, security.

We welcome the improvement in the security situation mentioned in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2008/19). Perhaps the initial returns of refugees and internally displaced persons, albeit modest at this point, reflect that improvement. We hope that this trend will continue through an improvement in the political process in the country. In paragraphs 3 and 4, the report states that progress in that regard has been slow.

We ought perhaps to commend the adoption of the Justice and Accountability Law and the consensus on the need to implement article 140 of the constitution. Mr. De Mistura has played a commendable role in that regard. Those are positive indicators. However, they are certainly not sufficient to allow us to talk about genuine progress in the political process.

With regard to the security situation, I must point to paragraph 54 of the report, concerning security companies. We believe that such security companies are akin to mercenary companies. Their conduct in Iraq justifies not only discontinuing their use but also prosecuting them. There is much talk of human rights; perhaps those engaging in it should stop and consider the activities of these companies.

Libya encourages all parties in Iraq to work towards reconciliation. We encourage the Government of Iraq to persevere in its efforts to reach out to neighbouring countries, which will certainly have a positive effect on improving security and humanitarian conditions for the people of Iraq. In that regard, we welcome the October meeting of neighbouring States held in Kuwait, as well as November's Istanbul meeting of foreign ministers of neighbouring States of Iraq, with the participation of international organizations and others.

We believe that the current conditions in Iraq require that all of Iraq's resources, human and material alike, be utilized for reconstruction. We therefore strongly support Iraq's call for the cancellation of all debts accumulated under the oil-for-food programme. We also call for the cancellation of compensation, or at least a moratorium on its payment. These funds should be used for the development of Iraq.

Moreover, we call for a reversal of the brain drain suffered by Iraq due to unemployment or insecurity. We know that this is not an easy task, but it is a worthy one that merits much effort. We believe that this could begin with the Government of Iraq devoting greater attention to those who have left for neighbouring countries. We thank those countries, in particular Syria and Jordan, for their sacrifices and their hospitality.

We very much appreciate the efforts of United Nations agencies in Iraq. We hope that future reports of the Secretary-General will include details about UNESCO's support for the Government of Iraq in its efforts to repatriate the cultural heritage that has been pillaged from the country.

In conclusion, we support the efforts of UNAMI to assist Iraq. We hope that all possible resources will be made available to the mission and to the Office of the Special Representative. We share the concerns of the Secretary-General regarding the need to ensure the security of the mission.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Iraq.

Mr. Al Bayati (Iraq): Allow me, at the outset, to congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month and to thank your predecessor, the Permanent Representative of Italy, for his successful presidency last month. I would also like to welcome Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, who is present at this meeting for the first time to present the Secretary-General's report (S/2008/19) on the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). We commend his efforts to help Iraq and the Iraqi people. I would also like to thank Ambassador Khalilzad for his briefing on behalf of the multinational forces, which are not occupying forces but friendly forces helping Iraq and the Iraqi people to maintain security and to protect the borders, in accordance with resolutions 1546 (2004), 1637 (2005), 1723 (2006) and 1790 (2007).

My Government has considered the Secretary-General's report contained in document S/2008/19. We would like to present our comments in the light of developments and progress in the situation in Iraq.

With regard to the evaluation of the political situation, the Iraqi Government is determined to continue its efforts to achieve national reconciliation, to reinforce social cohesion and to avoid a civil war. The Iraqi political arena is currently witnessing active political interaction among political figures and leaders to advance the political process and reach agreement in favour of the Iraqi people. Moreover, the Iraqi Council of Representatives recently adopted the Justice and Accountability Law, which is considered to be a very positive step towards achieving national reconciliation and healing past wounds. The Council of Representatives is currently considering the ratification of the hydrocarbons law, the 2008 budget and the law on governorates.

With regard to Iraq's efforts to normalize its situation in the international arena and establish relations based on mutual respect, cooperation and friendship, the Iraqi Government has signed a declaration of principles for a long-term relationship of cooperation and friendship between the Republic of Iraq and the United States of America, which will be a framework for future political, economic, security and diplomatic relations between the two countries.

My Government looks forward to regaining Iraq's normal position in the international community and to overcoming the heavy burden inherited from the previous dictatorship, which subjected Iraq to special measures stipulated under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations. My Government also looks forward to the Security Council addressing Iraqi issues beyond Chapter VII and in line with the significant changes that have taken place in Iraq, and to starting a new chapter of friendly and normal relations with the international community.

The efforts led by the Iraqi Government in cooperation with the United Nations during the second expanded meeting of foreign ministers of neighbouring States of Iraq, held in Istanbul in November 2007, led to the endorsement of an ad hoc Baghdad-based support mechanism. We expect that mechanism to contribute to achieving security and stability in Iraq and the whole region and to implementing what is to be agreed upon by the ministers.

With regard to Iraqi refugees abroad and internally displaced persons as a result of sectarian

violence, the Iraqi Government is keen to follow up on this issue with the Governments of brotherly countries hosting Iraqi refugees, especially neighbouring countries, and to provide for the refugees' needs, facilitate their voluntary return to Iraq, coordinate with international organizations and support host countries. In that regard, the Iraqi Government would like to express its gratitude to host countries and international organizations for their contributions to ease that humanitarian crisis. My Government would also like to express its appreciation for the efforts of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the recent appeal issued to support its efforts in assisting Iraqi refugees. We would like to reaffirm the continuous need for the support of the international community until this crisis comes to an end.

As for the security situation, the Iraqi Government is determined to confront and defeat terrorism and to restore security and stability in all parts of Iraq. Last year, the Government began a law enforcement plan in the framework of its efforts to enforce the rule of law, promote and protect human rights and confront criminal and terrorist activities targeting innocent civilians. That plan has brought about results, and the Iraqi people are witnessing those positive results. Dozens of members of the Al-Qaida leadership have been killed, and many others in that terrorist organization, which has sought to provoke sectarian strife in Iraq, have been detained. In addition, the efforts of the Iraqi political and religious leadership have led to a ceasefire among the militias, including the Mahdi Army.

The Iraqi Government has also made efforts to cleanse the security organs of corrupt elements that had infiltrated them. That step has led to the rebuilding of confidence between the people and the security organs. We should also mention the fact that the increase in the number of the multinational forces and the role that they have played in cooperating with the Iraqi forces have helped in restoring security and stability in Iraq and in reducing the number of terrorist activities and the amount of violence, in addition to implementation of the law enforcement plan and the deployment of the Awakening forces in troubled areas. The Iraqi Government is keen to invest in those improvements in the security situation by taking over responsibility for security in the Iraqi provinces, which it has done in nine provinces thus far. The Government is working to increase the preparedness of the Iraqi security forces to assume their responsibilities throughout the country.

In the light of the significant improvements in the security situation in Iraq, my Government would like to invite, from this rostrum, all brotherly and friendly countries to reopen their embassies in Iraq. We are also looking forward to support from the international community for our efforts to restore stability and security in Iraq. In addition, we welcome the recent steps taken by the United Nations to resume operations in Basra. We look forward to the reopening of its office in that city to provide needed assistance to the Iraqi people, in accordance with resolution 1770 (2007).

My Government is keen to reform the Iraqi economy, which was damaged by the wars launched by the previous regime against its neighbours — wars that exhausted and wasted Iraqi wealth. The Iraqi Government is determined to utilize its revenues to improve the standard of living and to increase the prosperity of the Iraqi people. The Iraqi Council of Representatives has adopted a series of measures, including pension and salary increases for the retired and civil servants. It has also approved social security for the poor, orphans and the disabled.

Furthermore, the Government is seeking to make full use of its 2008 national budget to carry out projects and development plans, and it has declared 2008 a year for investment and development in Iraq. The Government is also determined to take decisive measures to combat corruption and to work to establish effective and transparent national institutions. It recently organized a conference, under the auspices of the Prime Minister, His Excellency Mr. Nuri al-Maliki, to discuss ways to combat the dangerous phenomenon of corruption.

The Government and the people of Iraq, while working to rebuild their country and its infrastructure in order to fulfil the people's aspirations to development and prosperity, are requesting that the percentage of compensation paid from Iraqi oil revenues be reduced, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions, from 5 per cent to 1 per cent. In that regard, the Iraqi Government is working with our brothers in the State of Kuwait to find suitable solutions that will serve the interests of both brotherly countries. The Iraqi Government is also working with other countries to resolve the issue of Iraqi debt in accordance with the Paris Club measures. We would like to express our gratitude to all the countries — including, most recently, the Republic of Serbia — that recently cancelled Iraqi debt, and we would like to ask our brotherly countries to support the Iraqi people's efforts to rebuild their country by cancelling Iraqi debt.

We look forward to the international community's continued support for the economic and development processes taking place in Iraq, through continued support for and contributions to the International Compact with Iraq. We also ask that the international community support the Iraqi Government's efforts to provide the basic services of electricity, clean water, fuel and health care and to develop the service sector.

In conclusion, the Iraqi Government would like to express its appreciation to all brotherly and friendly countries that have supported the Iraqi people during a difficult period. We would also like to express our appreciation for the efforts of Mr. De Mistura and his team in Iraq and New York. The Iraqi Government reaffirms its ardent hope that the United Nations will strengthen its role in Iraq by increasing its field presence. We also reaffirm our cooperation with UNAMI in Iraq.

In that regard, we would like to mention the invitation addressed to UNAMI's Human Rights Office from the Ministries of Justice, Defence, Interior, and Labour and Social Affairs in Baghdad and Kurdistan to visit detention facilities and prisons to look into the situation of prisoners and detainees. The invitation clearly attests to the keen desire of the Iraqi Government to maintain its relations with UNAMI on the basis of cooperation and coordination in the various areas of its mandate, without prejudice to sovereign Iraqi decisions. I would also like to express my Government's willingness to contribute to the building of UNAMI's new headquarters in Iraq in order to facilitate the fulfilment of its mandate under resolution 1770 (2007).

Mr. Urbina (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like to begin by thanking Mr. De Mistura for his briefing to the Council and Ambassador Khalilzad for his briefing on the Multinational Force.

My delegation requested the floor after Ambassador Al Bayati had made his statement because we were convinced that the statement would provide additional elements that the Council should consider. It is possible that, in future, we will again ask the Council's permission to take the floor after the interested parties have done so.

Costa Rica believes that, as other delegations have stated, the humanitarian situation in Iraq remains worrisome. However, we believe that we must acknowledge and welcome the progress made with regard to establishing security and the rule of law in Iraq. We welcome the Special Representative's statement that 2008 should be a year of sovereignty and responsibility.

In that connection, we welcome the willingness of the Government of Iraq and its political forces to move forward with flexibility. We note with satisfaction the agreements of the political forces to promote agreements leading to national reconciliation, which we consider an important element in the ultimate resolution of the Iraqi situation. We welcome the spirit in which the Government of Iraq is calling for international support while, at the same time, expressing its will to assume ownership of its own national process.

In that regard, we recall how, in a letter dated in December 2007, the Iraqi Government shared with us how it had replaced the multinational forces, in terms of security, in eight provinces. Costa Rica — I believe that the representative of Indonesia said this as well — anxiously awaits significant progress in that process.

We were also pleased to read in December's letter from the Iraqi Prime Minister of his agreement to the extension of UNAMI's mandate for a further year, that it would be subject to ongoing review and that it could be concluded earlier at the request of the Iraqi Government. We also welcome the statement made today by the representative of Iraq concerning the desire of his country, people and Government no longer to be considered under the provisions of Chapter VII of the Charter and to normalize their relations with the international community.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I give the floor to Mr. De Mistura to respond to the questions and comments that have been put to him.

Mr. De Mistura: Very briefly, I just want to say on behalf of all my colleagues in Baghdad, Erbil, Basra and, hopefully, Kirkuk how much we appreciate the positive comments, good advice and encouragement of each of the speakers today in this meeting in the context of a very constructive period. I will bring them back to Baghdad and we will certainly look at them again, because they will help guide us in the future mission. As I said, 2008 is going to be special and crucial to all of us.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 12.20 p.m.